

## THE REVIVAL OF TRADE AND TOWNS

Starting in the 10th century, trade gradually revived as the ending of barbarian invasions permitted more settled conditions and safer transportation for persons and goods. Later the Crusades heightened European demand for Eastern luxury products. Increased trade stimulated the growth of favorably located towns.

Towns had not entirely disappeared even during the Early Middle Ages. Now, providing facilities for storage, marketing, transportation, and production of goods, towns were essential to commerce. Medieval towns, first controlled by nearby feudal lords, later secured their freedom (1) by purchasing charters from a lord or monarch or, more rarely, (2) by successful armed uprisings for independence.

## THE RISE OF THE BOURGEOISIE

As trade increased and towns grew, a new economic and social class evolved, the *bourgeoisie*, or townspeople. It consisted of enterprising persons: merchants, shopkeepers, bankers, and professional people. Since it stood between the lowest (serfs) and highest (lords) feudal classes, the bourgeoisie came to be known as the *middle class*.

## LEADING MEDIEVAL TRADE CENTERS

1. **In Italy.** *Venice, Genoa, Pisa, and Naples*—cities on the Italian seacoast—soon dominated trade between Europe and the eastern Mediterranean. These cities had the advantages of (a) a Mediterranean location and (b) a commercial tradition dating back to the Roman Empire. Italian ships carried European wheat, wine, lumber, and wool to such eastern Mediterranean cities as *Alexandria* and *Constantinople*. They returned with valuable Eastern luxuries.

2. **In Belgium.** *Bruges and Ghent*—cities in the Belgian province of Flanders—became the leading north European commercial centers. These Flemish (a word derived from Flanders) cities were advantageously situated at the crossroads of the trade routes from northern Europe and Italy. The main trade routes from Italy went (a) across the Mediterranean, through the Strait of Gibraltar, and along the Atlantic coast and (b) across the Alps and down the Rhine River. (See map, page 97.)

The Flemish cities imported Eastern products from the Italian cities for sale throughout northern Europe. They also produced and exported their own woolen cloth.